

What is claimed is:

1 1. A method of enabling an instant messaging (“IM”) user to specify policy information
2 usable in responding to arrival of instant messages, comprising steps of:
3 defining, by the IM user, policy information specifying criteria for responding to arrival of
4 instant messages; and
5 using the defined policy information, upon arrival of an instant message from an IM sender
6 not already participating in an IM session with the IM user, to programmatically determine a
7 response to the arriving instant message.

1 2. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the policy information identifies a particular
2 IM sender.

1 3. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the policy information identifies characteristics
2 of IM senders.

1 4. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the policy information specifies static criteria.

1 5. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the policy information specifies dynamic
2 criteria.

1 6. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the policy information specifies a combination
2 of static and dynamic criteria.

1 7. The method according to Claim 3, wherein the using step further comprises the step of
2 accessing a repository, using an identifier of the IM sender found in the arriving instant message,
3 to determine whether the characteristics are met for this IM sender.

1 8. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the response is to open a new IM window for
2 the arriving instant message.

1 9. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the policy information is specified as a set of
2 rules containing the criteria for opening a new IM window for incoming instant messages and
3 wherein the programmatically determined response is to open a new IM window for the arriving
4 instant message.

1 10. The method according to Claim 9, wherein the rules further specify one or more attributes
2 of the IM window to be opened.

1 11. The method according to Claim 8, wherein the policy further specifies one or more
2 attributes of the IM window to be opened.

1 12. The method according to Claim 10, wherein one of the attributes comprises whether the
2 IM window to be opened is to be opened in a minimized state.

1 13. The method according to Claim 10, wherein the attributes of the IM window to be opened
2 include whether the window flashes when rendered.

1 14. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the response is to generate an audible indicator
2 to signal the arrival of the instant message.

1 15. The method according to Claim 14, wherein the audible indicator is generated only if the
2 policy indicates that a new IM window is not to be opened for displaying the arriving instant
3 message.

1 16. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the policy information is specified as a set of
2 rules containing the criteria for opening a new IM window for incoming instant messages and
3 wherein the programmatically determined response is to display an indicator of the arriving instant
4 message in a particular IM window that provides a visual indicator of availability of one or more
5 instant messages.

1 17. The method according to Claim 16, wherein the IM user can selectively view, from the
2 particular IM window, any of the one or more instant messages.

1 18. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the policy information identifies a list of
2 selected applications that may be active on a computing device of the IM user.

1 19. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the policy information identifies specified types
2 of entries that may be scheduled on the IM user's electronic calendar.

1 20. A method of selectively opening instant messaging ("IM") windows, comprising steps of:
2 receiving an inbound instant message for a recipient IM user; and
3 using policy information to programmatically determine whether a new IM window should
4 be opened for the received instant message, if an IM session is not already established between the
5 recipient IM user and a sending IM user who sent the received instant message.

1 21. The method according to Claim 20, further comprising the step of providing a visual
2 indicator to the recipient IM user that the instant message was received when the using step does
3 not open the new IM window.

1 22. The method according to Claim 21, further comprising the step of providing an audible
2 indicator to the recipient IM user that the instant message was received when the using step does
3 not open the new IM window.

1 23. A method of controlling proliferation of instant messaging ("IM") windows, comprising
2 steps of:
3 enabling a plurality of IM users to define criteria under which new IM windows should be
4 opened responsive to receiving an instant message from message senders with whom an IM
5 session is not already established;

6 using the defined criteria to determine, for at least one of the IM users, whether a new IM
7 window should be opened; and
8 charging a fee for operation of either or both of the enabling and using steps.

1 24. A system for enabling an instant messaging (“IM”) user to specify policy information
2 usable in responding to arrival of instant messages, comprising:
3 means for defining, by the IM user, policy information specifying criteria for responding to
4 arrival of instant messages; and
5 means for using the defined policy information, upon arrival of an instant message from an
6 IM sender not already participating in an IM session with the IM user, to programmatically
7 determine a response to the arriving instant message.

1 25. A system for selectively opening instant messaging (“IM”) windows, comprising:
2 means for receiving an inbound instant message for a recipient IM user; and
3 means for using policy information to programmatically determine whether a new IM
4 window should be opened for the received instant message, if an IM session is not already
5 established between the recipient IM user and a sending IM user who sent the received instant
6 message.

1 26. A computer program product for enabling an instant messaging (“IM”) user to specify
2 policy information usable in responding to arrival of instant messages, the computer program
3 product embodied on one or more computer-readable media and comprising:

4 computer-readable program code means for defining, by the IM user, policy information
5 specifying criteria for responding to arrival of instant messages; and
6 computer-readable program code means for using the defined policy information, upon
7 arrival of an instant message from an IM sender not already participating in an IM session with the
8 IM user, to programmatically determine a response to the arriving instant message.

1 27. A computer program product for selectively opening instant messaging (“IM”) windows,
2 the computer program product embodied on one or more computer-usable media and comprising:
3 computer-readable program code means for receiving an inbound instant message for a
4 recipient IM user; and
5 computer-readable program code means for using policy information to programmatically
6 determine whether a new IM window should be opened for the received instant message, if an IM
7 session is not already established between the recipient IM user and a sending IM user who sent
8 the received instant message.